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ABSTRACT

Information about the role and responsibilities of school board members is presented in this seminar summary report. Five topics emerged from participant discussions as warranting further examination, which include the necessity of school boards, their training, their evaluation, their role in participatory decision-making, and their role in community relations. Five sections address these issues and, in each section, a summary of participants' responses and recommendations is offered. (LMI)

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A VIEW FROM THE INSIDE:

The Roles and Responsibilities of School Board Members

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Report of the Select Seminar on Excellence in Education

The Capital Area School Development Association
School of Education, The University at Albany
State University of New York

EA 022 546

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A VIEW FROM THE INSIDE:

The Roles and Responsibilities of School Board Members

Report of the Select Seminar on Excellence in Education

November 1990

Sponsored by:
The Capital Area School Development Association
School of Education, The University at Albany
State University of New York

Funding for this Seminar was provided by:
- The Golub Corporation
- Capital Newspapers
- Charles Freihofer Baking Company
- Key Bank of Eastern New York, N.A.
- The University at Albany Foundation

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Foreword

The course of our democracy has proven that it is healthy to stop every so often and reflect on what we expect and need from our public institutions. That they remain responsive, accountable, and understandable to the general public should be important to all of us.

We are delighted that the Capital Area School Development Association has recognized this importance for public school boards. As surveys often have shown, school boards tend to bear the brunt of public misunderstanding and apathy, even though expectations held for their performance remain extraordinarily high. A balanced picture of the challenges and choices for school boards, developed by board members themselves working with their colleagues in the education community, is truly useful.

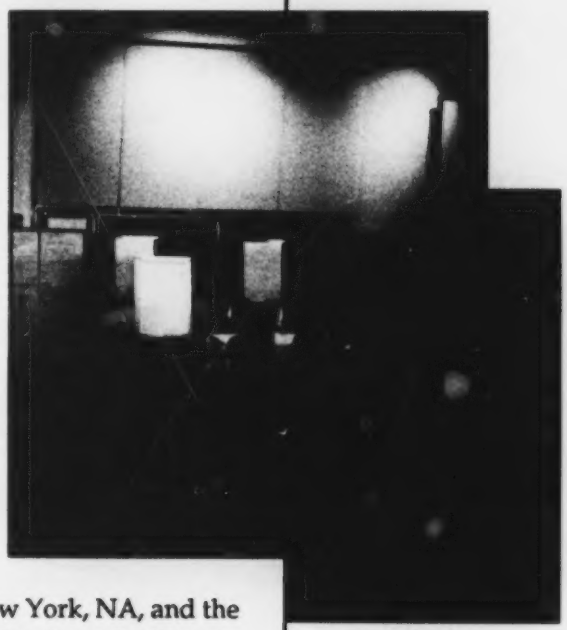
The following "view from the inside" strongly affirms local school board leadership, but also honestly points out where and how boards might improve themselves. The report's suggestions about ways to do this—through board development, reliance on adopted local policies, formal self-evaluation, and good school-community relations—are strongly supported by the New York State School Boards Association.

As you read, remember that our school boards durably serve children well because their members voluntarily dedicate themselves to act as bridges between school and community. In a recent Association needs assessment, we discovered some startling board member averages: six years on the local school board, eight hours per week spent on board-related work, about 70 percent with longstanding service on PTAs, and more than half currently serving on other boards in their communities. In essence, the "average" board member is anything but average when it comes to demonstrating commitments to children and community.

May this report stimulate your awareness of what it really means to serve your community and preserve its future through school boardsmanship.

Louis Grumet
Executive Director
New York State School Boards Association

Preface



Twenty-seven people—nine school board members, ten administrators, and eight teachers—met in a series of five full-day sessions to have a conversation about the roles and responsibilities of school board members and to write a report on the results of their deliberations including observations and recommendations related to themes and topics selected for discussion. This Select Seminar on Excellence in Education held its meetings from December 1989 continuing through March 1990. It is our observation that practicing educators including, in this seminar, active school board members must be heard—their observations heeded—if changes encouraged by the reform movement are to be more than cosmetic.

This seminar, which was funded by the Golub Corporation, Capital Newspapers, Charles Freihofer Baking Company, Key Bank of Eastern New York, NA, and the University at Albany Foundation, provided an occasion for a significant group of teachers, administrators, and school board members to participate actively in discussions about the roles and responsibilities of school board members. We believe its significance will rest not only on the lucid and well-reasoned discussion embodied in its content but on the fact that it comes primarily from those who are actively involved day to day in teaching, administrating and setting policy in local schools.

The support of the Golub Corporation, Capital Newspapers, Charles Freihofer Baking Company, Key Bank of Eastern New York, NA, and the University at Albany Foundation is a testimony not only to their generosity but to their recognition of our mutual interdependence.

Robert H. Koff
Dean
School of Education

Richard Bamberger
Executive Director
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Seminar Participants

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Teacher
Watervliet City Schools
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Robert Speck
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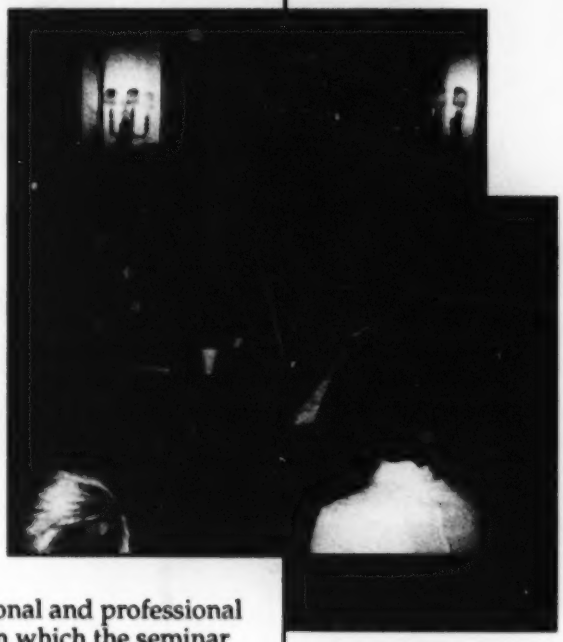
The Process

The CASDA select seminars follow a very simple structure based upon a set of guiding principles:



1. Participants need to commit adequate time—to work, to reflect, and to write. Most seminars have been conducted for five full days spread about a month apart over the first three months with the final session being a two-day overnight retreat in the middle to the end of the fourth month

2. A conducive working environment is very important. The seminars have been conducted in "protected environments"—away from the work site, in quiet and aesthetically pleasing surroundings with special care being given to the quality of food and refreshments. We believe this clearly is a first step in communicating to participants that the seminar is special and there are high expectations that the deliberations of its members will have an important result.

3. The seminar participants are the experts. We believe these select seminars have been highly successful in part because of the high degree of personal and professional respect afforded participants and the central belief on which the seminar series was founded: "that consciously competent teachers and administrators are the best arbiters of educational practice." While participants do extensive reading during the seminars, visiting experts and lecturers are not usually a part of this experience. The twenty-seven teachers, administrators, and school board members who participated in this seminar constituted the body of experts.

4. Roles are "checked at the door." One's ideas must stand on their own, be debated, accepted, or discarded without reference to one's position, prior experience, or education.

5. Seminars are self-governing entities with organizers serving the group. The coordination of the seminar was managed by personnel from CASDA. After providing the initial structure and on-going logistical support, they worked to transfer the governance and direction from themselves to the participants. By the end of the seminar, it is fair to say that it was self-governed with the coordinators taking direction from the seminar group.

6. The experience is at least as important as the product. All seminar participants agree that the process, the experience, is most important; in fact, the report might be quite different if the process had continued over time, this representing but one point in an ongoing process when, although there was much agreement on important issues, there was some disagreement as well. Even so, the report provides an important documentation of the experience and serves to validate for each of the participants the energy and effort they expended.

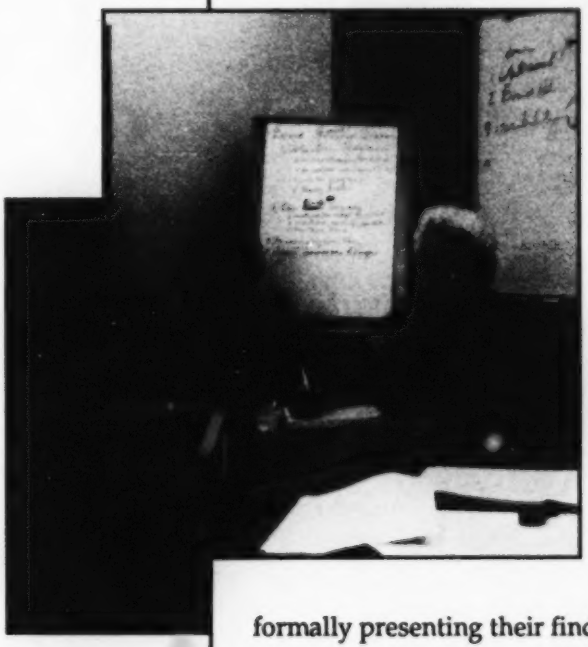
It is also hoped that this report will provide inspiration and help to those who read it and may assist in a modest way to continue what has become a very important national conversation on teaching and schools. We firmly believe such an ongoing conversation can only result in better education for all of our children.

Introduction

Most of us arrived at the first seminar session with preconceived ideas and beliefs. All of us were either board of education members, teachers, or administrators. The three groups of participants have had various experiences in education, and over the years our perceptions had become "colored" by rumors, limited knowledge, and hearsay.

We weren't negative about the process or about the other group members, but we were more than willing to look at and discuss the issues from our own comfortable perspective.

The first session was held on December 7, 1989, at the Rockefeller Institute in Albany. Introductions and social amenities helped to loosen us up a bit, as did the initial activities and discussions led by the seminar facilitators from CASDA. Beginning discussion groups were made up of "like" members; for example, all school administrators...all board members...etc. This process helped us begin talking about the issues — more so than if we immediately found ourselves in mixed groups. During this first session, we had the opportunity to discuss and respond generally to three questions regarding the major issues facing boards of education.



Our second session was held on January 10, 1990, again at the Rockefeller Institute. This time, discussion groups were mixed — and we focused on the identification of major issues, concerns, and problems that are currently facing boards of education. As discussions continued and became more specific, we all began to develop a vision from the "other side of the fence." Board members started to realize how important their actions and behaviors are to school staff, and conversely, administrators and teachers became empathetic to the trials and tribulations of board membership. The day's activities concluded with each group formally presenting their findings and recommendations.

Our third and final "single-day" session was held on February 2, 1990, also at the Rockefeller Institute. Working in mixed groups, we discussed the topics of board of education/administration/community relationships and also analyzed a case study that involved a board member who acted inappropriately.

Five distinct questions/topics emerged as those warranting further discussion, review and evaluation. These included:

- ❑ Should school boards exist?
- ❑ Should school board members receive training?
- ❑ Should school boards be evaluated?
- ❑ Should school boards have a role in shared decision-making?
- ❑ Should school boards have a role in community relations?

These five critical points were the discussion topics of our two day program held at the Rensselaerville Institute on March 12 and 13, 1990. Mixed groups met and brainstormed both components and recommendations for their particular topic. As a concluding activity, each group presented a formal summary of its recommendations to a large group that included the other seminar participants, as well as approximately thirty guests from Capital Region school districts.

What follows in this report is a summary of the responses and recommendations. We hope that State-level organizations, boards of education, and other school personnel are able to use this information to improve the educational process.

Should School Boards Exist?

In a democratic nation, with local autonomy being important, it is essential to have school boards to represent the diverse populations within the community.

This question kept arising during our discussions of board members' roles and responsibilities. One opinion was that school boards exist by law and their existence was, therefore, not in the scope of our discussions. A counter opinion suggested that if this question could not be answered affirmatively, and the existence of school boards could not be justified, then the questions of roles and responsibilities were a waste of time. "In a democratic nation, with local autonomy being important, it is essential to have school boards to represent the diverse populations within the community," said one participant.

Albert Shanker, President of the American Federation of Teachers, said in a July 6, 1986 *New York Times* advertisement titled *WHERE WE STAND*, "School Boards are the way the public controls schools in a democracy. Abolishing school boards because they get in the way of efficient school functioning would be like abolishing Congress or state legislatures in the name of efficiency."

All of our four discussion groups reported that they had examined this topic by looking at the positive impacts of abolishing school boards versus the negative. Each of the groups reported similar findings: if

school boards did not exist, (1) professional educators would be in charge of the schools, (2) programs would be more equitably implemented among school districts, and (3) "poor" school boards would be eliminated. However, the following negatives would result:

No

— community representation;
— local policy control;
— response to local needs;
— continuity over a period of time;
— provision of checks and balances;
— lines of accountability;
— protection from politicization of administration.

Although this was the most heatedly debated topic at the seminar, all groups supported the existence of school boards. One group stated, "One may make a case for the fact that the duties and responsibilities carried out by local boards could be assumed by various groups and/or agencies. However, in the current structure of our society where local jurisdiction for our schools is still the rule, the elected local school board provides the unique link of responsibility and accountability between the community at large and the school district. Presently, no other vehicle is able to assume this role." Another group suggested that if school boards did not exist, something similar to them would have to be invented.

Yes

School boards should exist. This concept was not only supported by our discussions, but also by the pamphlet *Local Control of the Public Schools and Education Reform*, written by Thomas A. Shannon in January 1990, and distributed by the National School Boards Association. Mr. Shannon discusses, in more detail, many more of the democratic ideals supporting local control of education.

After reaching this conclusion, our investigations into the roles and responsibilities of school board members became most important.

Should School Boards Receive Training?

Do school administrators and teachers know about the roles and responsibilities of school board members? Do board members practice their role as trustees or policy makers and not get involved in administration? Are board members trained to carry out their responsibilities?

The seminar training group discussed these issues before focusing on the specific issue of board training. The group consisted of three administrators, one teacher and three board members. The varied backgrounds and interests of all seven people resulted in an open and spirited discussion. For example, the administrators discussed the need for board leadership and good communications with the superintendent and the community. The teacher discussed the need for risk taking and shared decision making at the building level. The board members were concerned about their role as policy makers, about communications with district residents and legislators, about superintendent relationships, and about educational leaders for high quality education for all students. One surprise to all participants was the time commitment of board members throughout the school year.

With these issues in mind, this seminar group spent the second day and a half discussing board training needs and recommendations. What kind of training would be best for new board members, for senior board members? What topics should be included in a district training program for board members? Should board training be mandated? If mandated, what are the positive results - the negative results? What training material is available? How can BOCES help? Would a training program encourage or discourage board service?

One surprise to all participants was the time commitment of board members throughout the school year.

1 WHAT KIND OF TRAINING WOULD BE BEST FOR NEW BOARD MEMBERS, FOR SENIOR BOARD MEMBERS?

Board training should be identified by stages, namely:

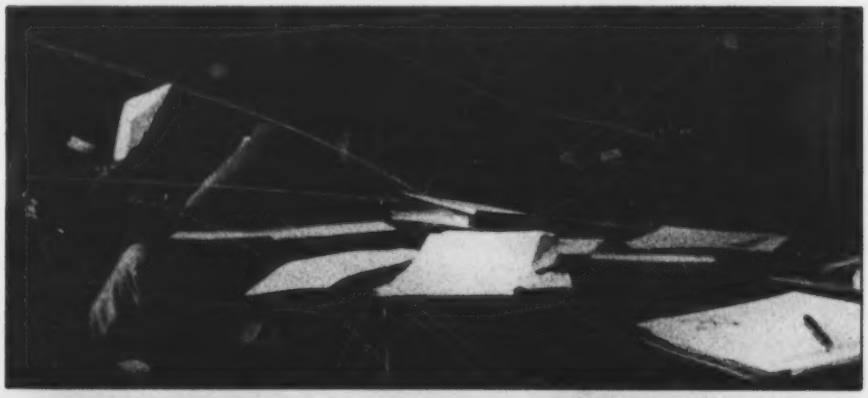
a. Before election - orientation and general information on board roles and responsibilities.

b. After election - training before and immediately after a new member takes his or her seat.

c. Current and senior board members - training for continued growth.

One important training guide is the *Joint Code of Conduct for School Boards and Superintendents* adopted in 1983 by the New York Council of School Superintendents (NYCOSS) and by the New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA). It is important for each new prospective board member to understand the role of trustee in a cooperative board of five, seven, or nine members with equal responsibility. It is important to understand the responsibilities of superintendent as the chief executive officer.

It is important for each new prospective board member to understand the role of trustee in a cooperative board of five, seven, or nine members with equal responsibility.



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Among the ways such assistance can be provided to candidates before the election are:

1. Provide New York State School Boards Association or comparable orientation literature for prospective board members.
2. Provide information on the responsibilities and time commitment of members of the board of education.
3. Extend an invitation to attend all board meetings.
4. Familiarize the candidates, upon request, with the operation of the school district.
5. Inform candidates about education laws that address the filing of campaign expenditure statements and "electioneering."

The training of newly-elected board members should include:

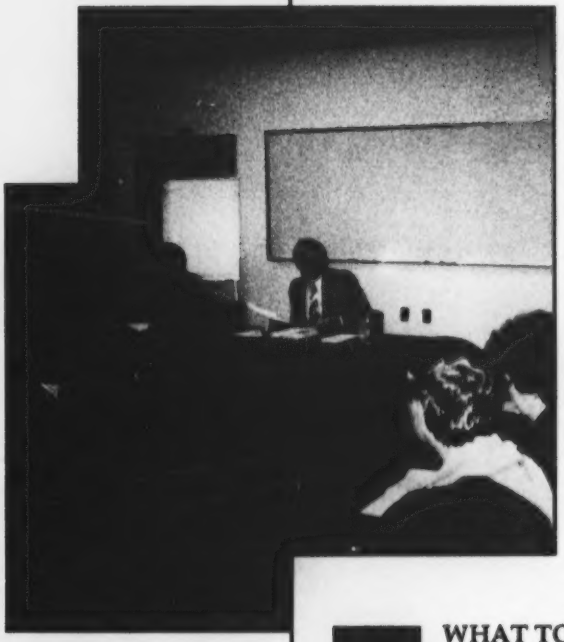
1. An invitation to attend all meetings of the board between the date of election and the time when the new member's term of office begins.
2. The weekly board of education information packet should be distributed to newly-elected members beginning with the first packet following their election.
3. The board president or superintendent should arrange for the transfer of essential school documents or publications from the ex-board member to the new member (i.e., Board Policy Book, School Law Manual, etc.).
4. The board of education and the superintendent of schools and his staff should organize an orientation program for new board members that will include:
   - — Operations of the board
   - — Board Policy Manual
   - — Legal responsibilities
   - — Relationships with the superintendent, school district employees, and district residents.
   - — Available NYSSBA training programs.

The board president, or his/her designee, should work with the new board member to complete the initial orientation program.

The new board member should also participate in the New York State School Boards Association's New School Board Members Seminar conducted once in the summer and repeated in early September.

For senior board members, training and self-development should be a continuous activity. The board member should work to improve his/her leadership skills and understanding of current and new educational programs to improve student learning. Various ways to attain this on-going growth include:

1. Attending and participating in local, state, and national board of education conferences and workshops.
2. Reading the available state and national education journals and position papers, and sharing the findings with fellow board members.
3. Participating in the board's annual self-assessment and follow up discussions for board improvement.
4. Participating in an annual retreat with fellow board members and the superintendent to discuss board dynamics and self-improvement goals.

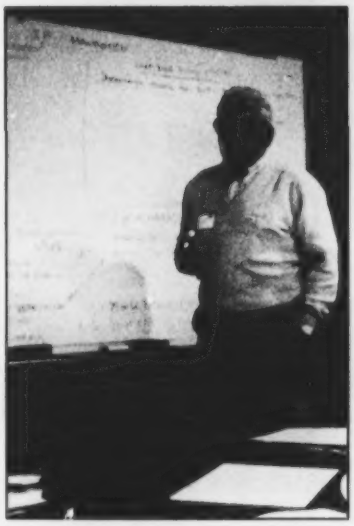


One very important seminar introduced several years ago by NYSSBA is the Senior Institute. Topics such as good boardsmanship, school board governance, national and state educational goals, and conflict management are covered in this conference. Another NYSSBA seminar workshop of interest to many board members is the State Legislation Network. Topics on the state aid formula, state aid recommendations of the governor, board of regents, and the Educational Conference Board, and the other important legislative issues are discussed in some detail during this conference. Board members are encouraged to discuss these education issues with the legislators following the conference. The state legislators are very receptive to these one-on-one meetings.

2 WHAT TOPICS SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN A TRAINING PROGRAM FOR BOARD MEMBERS?

Although many school board activities are common to all school districts, each school board must define its specific needs for its own district. The important topics to be included in any training program for school board members should include:

- Mission and vision of the school district
- Relationship with superintendent
- Contents and use of policy manual and administration regulations
- Board operations



- Legal responsibilities
- Staff and personnel relationships
- Board-student relationships
- Board-community relationships
- General knowledge of instructional program
- General knowledge of business and finance
- General knowledge of non-instructional program
- Legislation programs and relationships
- Leadership skills
- Conflict management techniques
- Board behavior expectations
- Major state and federal educational issues
- Board self-assessment
- Superintendent evaluation
- Contract negotiations
- General knowledge of purchasing policy and capital equipment

Any training program for school board members should also include a visit to each school building and discussions with the principal and staff as time permits. Each school building has its own identity and supporting community. Community, staff, and student relationships are most important to the work of a board member.

Any training program for school board members should also include a visit to each school building and discussions with the principal and staff ...

3 MUST A SCHOOL DISTRICT DEVELOP ITS OWN TRAINING MATERIAL AND PROGRAM?

In most cases, no. There are a number of training documents available for immediate use. The program can be structured around the current operation of the school district with some assistance from other educational groups. Also, the superintendent can assist in defining the specific needs of the district.

There are a number of very good training documents available for use today. These include:

School Boards - Strengthening Grass Roots Leadership by the Institute of Educational Leadership 1986

Speaking of Leadership by Bill Clinton, Governor of Arkansas, 1986-87 Chairman, Education Commission of the States

National School Boards Association documents:
American School Boards - the Positive Power 1987
American School Board Journal - monthly issue
Local Control of the Public Schools and Education Reform 1990
Becoming a Better Board Member - third printing 1987

New York State School Boards Association documents:
Essential Leadership - School Boards in New York State - 1988
Law and Management Policies for Schools (LAMPS)
School Law 1988 - A Handbook for New School Board Members
Journal of the NYSSBA - monthly issue
— various position papers of NYSSBA

In addition, CASDA has conducted a number of Select Seminars on topics of interest to board members. The available Seminar reports titled "A View From The Inside:..." include:

- — High Schools in the 1990s
- — Education in the 1990s
- — An Action Plan for Gender Equity in New York State Educational Administration
- — Special Education
- — Arts in Education
- — Addressing the Impediments to Shared Decision Making
- — A Look at the National Reports

Board members should study these documents and consider the recommendations when developing the future of education for *all* students.

A number of school districts currently provide a copy of the NYSSBA document *Becoming a Better Board Member* to each new board member.

Board members have benefited from talking with other district people at conferences and visits to their schools. What better source of new training ideas than to talk with students in their schools or with parents?

BOCES or county school board organizations also offer an opportunity to discuss regional issues or to learn more about BOCES regional programs.

4 SHOULD TRAINING BE MANDATED? IF MANDATED, WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE RESULTS—WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVE RESULTS?

This Select Seminar Training Group concluded that there should be no state legislative requirement for a formal training program for board members at this time. One alternative is for the State Education Department, through Commissioner's Regulations, to require each school district to have a board training program, designed and run by the district. The availability and use of the training program could be reported in the Comprehensive Assessment Report (CAR) or the Excellence and Accountability Program Report (EAP). The overall board training requirement could be covered in the district's policy manual and the board's self-assessment program. This would result in local control of the training program so that school board members decide what's best for themselves and their district.

. . .there should be no state legislative requirement for a formal training program for board members . . .

One alternative is...to require each school district to have a board training program, designed and run by the district.

4a IF A TRAINING PROGRAM IS MANDATED, WHAT POSITIVE THINGS COULD HAPPEN?

— Board members will be better informed regarding the educational process, subsequently allowing them to make more appropriate decisions

— The board of education will be more organized, which will allow it and the individual board members to operate more effectively

— Time and effort can become focused on educational issues, as opposed to having the board "spin its wheels" on minor topics

— Board members will be better able to separate the concepts of *administrative action* versus *policy*, and act accordingly

— As members interact with neighboring boards, the "networking" process will help to promote more informed decisions

— The interpersonal dynamics on the board will improve

— New board members will be able to make informed and appropriate decisions much sooner than before

— The relationship, level of respect, and degree of cooperation between board members and the superintendent will increase

— The morale and performance throughout the entire school district will improve

— As board operations become more organized and effective, and as interpersonal relationships improve, there will be an intrinsic motivation for additional training and education.

4b IF A TRAINING PROGRAM IS MANDATED, WHAT NEGATIVE THINGS COULD HAPPEN?

— The awareness of an involved and formal training program may discourage capable persons from seeking board positions

— In order to participate in board training, members must be willing and able to make a time commitment

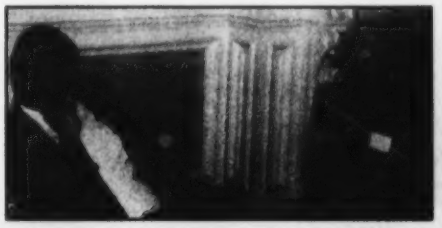
— There will be some additional costs associated with a training program

— Will training become "packaged" and decided upon by organizations beyond the local school board? If training is not local, is there a chance that local control of schools will be further eroded?

— Formal training for senior members may discourage some from seeking re-election and long-term board service

— There will be increased expectations upon the superintendent and his/her staff for many of the tasks associated with board training

Apparently at least one state has a mandated board training program that includes a written exam and interview. The program includes an award system for achieving various levels of training. This program may be worth looking into as a model for volunteer training. At the present time, however, New York State does not have a mandated training program.



5 HOW CAN BOCES HELP?

The BOCES should be called upon as a vehicle for providing school board orientation and inservice programs among several school districts within a region. The advantages are several:

— BOCES is already viewed as an arena for sharing ideas, providing educational services, and networking with persons from other school districts.

— BOCES has the expertise and logistical capacity for coordinating and delivering inservice programs.

— Representative school board members and administrators would serve in an advising capacity, planning and specifying the details of the program, including topics, and specifying sources of expertise on each topic.

— BOCES staff would coordinate and provide support to the advisory group and call upon NYSSBA, professional organizations, State Education Department staff, senior board members, etc., to provide information on specific topics.

— In addition to formal programs, school board members might find coming together through BOCES a natural forum for the exchange of information, ideas, and professional and personal growth.

— Working through BOCES is cost effective. Costs of the program would be shared among school districts and where appropriate be eligible for BOCES state aid.

*...our group feels strongly that the **time has arrived to institute some type of formal educational program** for board of education members.*

6 WILL A TRAINING PROGRAM ENCOURAGE OR DISCOURAGE BOARD SERVICE?

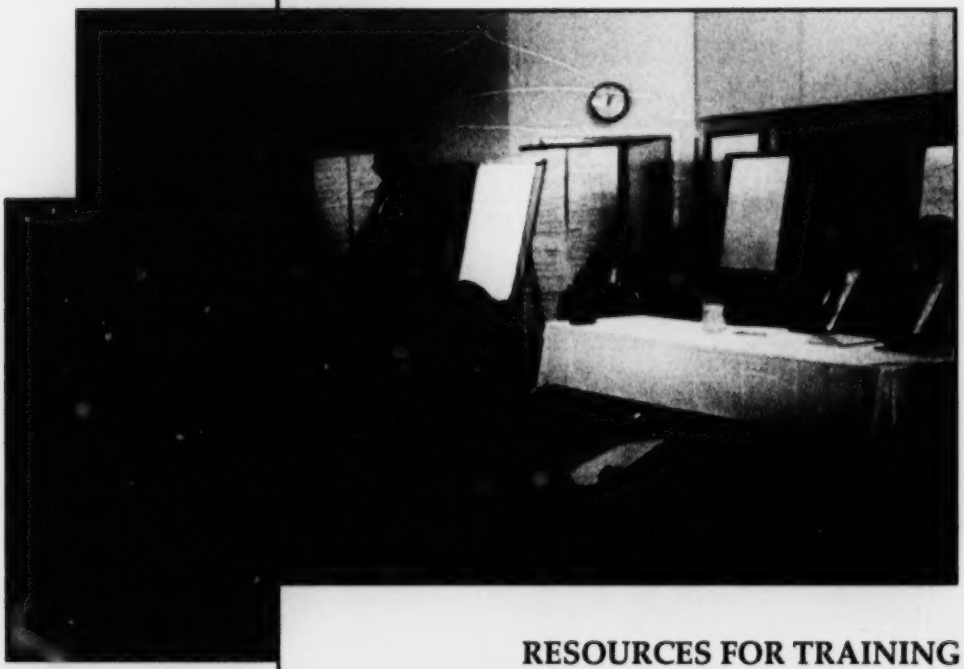
Some school districts currently have a board training program covering many of the topics listed in this seminar report. Current attendance at NYSSBA seminars, workshops, and the annual meeting is at an all-time high. A recent issue of *EducatioNEWS* (Vol. 3, No. 10) on "why school board members leave board service" confirmed that "the length of service and time commitment required by board service are important factors in the decision not to continue on the school board." It also reported that "the mean length of service among responding former board members was 7.5 years."

In summary, this report presents a number of issues relating to the training of newly elected and senior board members. As is obvious, there are two sides to every position. However, even with the possible negative results of school board training mentioned above, our group feels

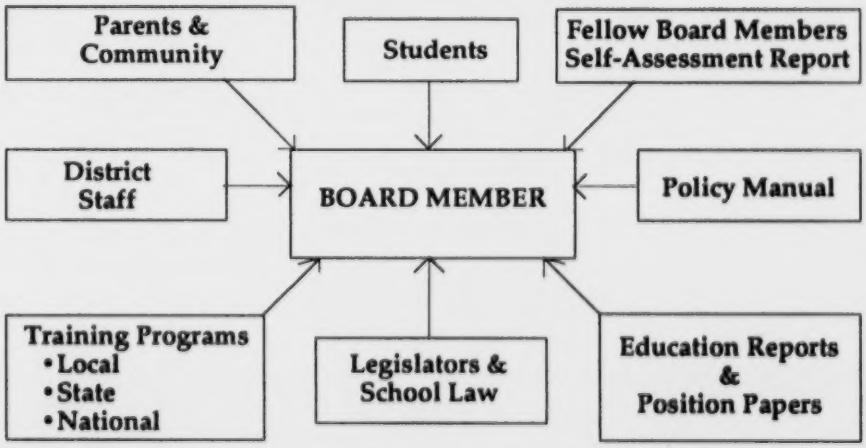
strongly that the **time has arrived to institute some type of formal educational program** for board of education members.

We feel that the **Commissioner of Education should mandate** board of education training within the existing Regulations. Perhaps, the newly-instituted Excellence and Accountability Program would provide an appropriate vehicle. Written correctly, this mandate will cause individual boards to assume the responsibility for identifying and specifying exactly what training they will offer and conduct.

After a board decides upon the topics and areas that they want training in, the procedure/process should be spelled out within the district's Board Policy Manual, specifying *who* will participate, *when* it will be offered, exactly *what* will be covered, and *who will provide* the training. Follow-up and evaluation of the training program, with subsequent policy addendums and changes can occur via the board's yearly self-assessment process.



RESOURCES FOR TRAINING



Should School Boards Be Evaluated?

Although there is no legal requirement for boards of education to be evaluated, seminar participants agreed on the importance of evaluation, to assess the effective functioning of the school board unit, as the board is accountable for the overall operation of the school district.

Some seminar participants felt that evaluating school boards should be "state mandated," while others believed it might be developed as a "requirement" and left in the hands of the local board of education to develop the process of evaluation. All participants agreed that the primary focus of evaluation was to guide the collective board towards improvement potential and professional growth, clearly identifying areas of strength and areas of concern. The evaluation tool could best be used to assist the board towards setting goals and taking action to improve its delivery of services to the school community. One seminar participant aptly stated, "The evaluation process should serve as a road map serves a driver. It shows the lay of the land and gives alternatives for the best course."

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Evaluation is a critical element of growth for school boards. It is important that boards establish a short term and long term process for evaluation and improvement. The election process, a three-year or five-year phenomenon, doesn't address board performance on a regular basis. The election process provides voters with an opportunity to select among board candidates who may be running for one or more seats on the board. "Making a choice among persons who have expressed a willingness to serve in this capacity is not the same as evaluating the functioning of the corporate body called a board of education," suggested one seminar participant.

Who is involved and who controls the evaluation process? Should employee groups who are responsible *to* the board be evaluators *of* the board? How do you involve the community you serve? Do you turn the evaluation process over to outside consultants? Seminar participants spent considerable time on the pitfalls related to the process of evaluation. By consensus the seminar participants recommend that boards take responsibility for their evaluation and involve all the various constituents in the process including parents, students, teachers, administrators, custodians, secretaries, community members, and all others impacted by the educational unit. The ideal instrument would allow for input from all the various groups. Long term, this process provides for an opportunity for ongoing dialogue. Evaluation should culminate in targeting improvement areas, identifying goals for the total board, and allowing for individual board members to reflect on their performance. Seminar participants noted their concerns regarding misuse of the evaluation: The potential political uses (backlashes) of the results of the evaluation, and the potential of "hurting" individual board members. One scenario might be that the evaluation could be used by one of the school unions to help support ousting a candidate who did not perform to the union's liking.

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The issue of public disclosure is sensitive. The intent of the evaluation is to improve the operation of the board unit. The sensitivity of interpersonal relationships subject to public scrutiny is a concern. The evaluation instrument/process is not a device to "get" people. One seminar participant stated, "It is essential the process not deteriorate into finger pointing." The law is clear that public disclosure of board meetings is mandated. There should be some built-in safeguards related to the specific responses of individuals completing the instrument as well as protecting against adverse comments made about individual board members. Stressing that boards should develop legals ways to guard against misuse of the evaluation process, seminar participants support honest feedback regarding the board's evaluation in a public forum. This process could serve to educate the public as well as the board on matters of importance to the school district.

The topic of how boards of education should be involved in the evaluation of school personnel was discussed. By consensus the seminar group emphatically agreed that boards should be directly involved in evaluating the performance of the superintendent, but boards should clearly delegate evaluation of other school personnel to the superintendent, who is responsible for developing and managing the evaluation process for these various groups. School boards should work with the

superintendent to develop the overall policy for evaluation, stipulating the purpose of the evaluation, and establishing the course and direction of the evaluation. Boards should *not* become entangled in developing evaluation instruments and tools, or directly review the performance of school personnel. Imagine a school assistant principal who disciplines a board member's child and then faces an evaluation by the board. Of more concern is the informal information that comes to board members about staff members being used in the evaluation process. It is safe to say that boards are not in a position to do a satisfactory job of assessing the performance of professional staff members.

Trust is a key component for the effective functioning of school boards. One board member stated, "The board and superintendent are the leadership team for the district; together they are ultimately accountable for all aspects of the operation of the district. In order to function effectively as a team, the board-superintendent relationship must be based on trust and an understanding and support of each other's goals." Trust between and among board members is an important aspect of the effective functioning of the board unit. Board members need to be team players who support the efforts of individual members as well as support the total board unit.

Training is a key component to developing good boards of education. The evaluation instrument could serve as a focus for areas in which board members need to receive additional help and training. The evaluation process in itself could be an excellent training tool for new board members, as well as present members serving the board, to assist them in their understanding of their roles as members of the board team.

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One seminar participant indicated, "The term *evaluation* connotes judgment, and boards may be reluctant to place themselves in a position of having their performance judged, especially by those outside the leadership team of board of education and superintendent." Yet, it is vitally important for the board to better understand how it is perceived by those groups within and outside the schools. A constructive critique of board operations and its effectiveness can serve as a valuable improvement tool for school boards to allow them to better communicate with the various publics they serve.

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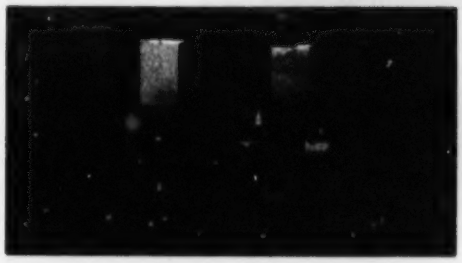

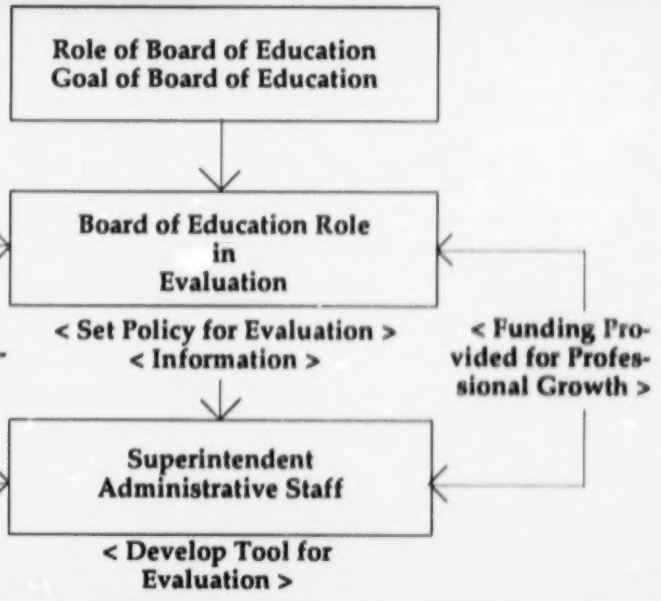

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❑ *Should School Boards Have a Role in Shared Decision Making?*

People are expressing a growing need to have a greater voice in determining the outcomes of issues which affect them.

One only needs to look at the events that have recently unfolded in places like South Africa, Berlin, Nicaragua and the Baltic States to realize that, globally, people are displaying a decreasing willingness to be dictated to and an increasing propensity to question the decisions of those who are governing. People are expressing a growing need to have a greater voice in determining the outcomes of issues which affect them. So it is in the microcosm of schools! Students, teachers, bus drivers and the like want input into the decisions affecting their lives.

CASDA recognized this fact and convened a Select Seminar which resulted in the publication *A View From The Inside: ADDRESSING THE IMPEDIMENTS TO SHARED DECISION MAKING*, December 1989. This report states that the implementation of shared decision making is blocked by a reluctance to change. It points out that this reluctance is caused by:

- ❑ Fear of change
- ❑ Lack of support once change is made
- ❑ Slowness of progress during the shared decision making process
- ❑ Lack of energy needed to implement change
- ❑ Lack of commitment by those set in their ways
- ❑ No models on which to base change
- ❑ Lack of trust among the participants
- ❑ Lack of vision and reliance on current decision methods
- ❑ Lack of money to accommodate extra workload
- ❑ Lack of role vision and sharing of responsibilities

"Creating an environment conducive to and supportive of change respects and encourages open communication between all parties, regardless of their roles."

The report continues by recommending that schools address both the general change process and the specific process of shared decision making. Schools need to encourage change, share a vision, increase trust, develop skills and establish a process for shared decision making. Our discussions addressed these recommendations and surprisingly, to all of us, we needed to adopt the often painful principles of shared decision making to form our conclusions. "Shared decision making is: (1) a reality; (2) variable by district; (3) in need of recognition," stated one of the seminar members.

Shared decision making in our local schools is a reality and its formal adoption and implementation is inevitable. Based on this, we recommend that decision makers alter their behavior to involve individuals who have a stake in the ultimate result.

We felt that the board of education's involvement in this process is to provide support in encouraging collaboration as a decision making model. Boards should have confidence in the process and trust in the participants.

This expressed confidence suggests that a certain climate exists within the organization. If this climate of confidence and trust does not exist, it must be carefully nurtured and painstakingly evolved for shared decision making to work. Another characteristic of that climate is a consistency and commonality of the goals, values, constraints, beliefs, limitations and vision of the school among all members of the school community (faculty, administration, board of education). Fostering these common understandings is a responsibility of all members of the community, including the board of education. We also felt that despite the perceived sense of urgency for change within the school governance structure and for educational reform, shared decision making should be gradually introduced into the setting. It should be implemented through evolution, not revolution. Participants should be trained in group process to develop their skill and have a firm commitment to time and a readiness for change; it should be gradually introduced issue by issue; groundwork should be laid and specific issues should be defined.

Boards should have confidence in the process and trust in the participants.

. . .shared decision making. . .should be implemented through evolution, not revolution.

WHAT IS THE SHARED DECISION MAKING PROCESS AND HOW IS IT IMPLEMENTED?

There is a disparity in the size and demographics of school districts. This disparity makes boards of education vastly different and creates differing issues for them to address. For this reason, we quickly recognized that no "canned" approach to shared decision making could be created to serve all districts. Therefore, we suggest that each individual board has to establish unique methods for implementing its shared decision making process. "By encouraging the process to happen, the board will arrive at an approach that is best for its own individual situation," a group member said.

However, we further believe that boards need to take the initiative in encouraging shared decision making. Boards should not wait for procedures to be established, but should help the process to begin and allow the evolution of an approach that will best suit the district's needs. The procedures for shared decision making will be established during the evolution process. It's important to remember that the sooner the process starts, the sooner shared decision making can work as a positive influence on school operations.

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"Boards are responsible for establishing policies under which shared decision making will take place. Boards also need to act as evaluators of the process and also need to assure that any impediments to the process are removed," said one seminar participant. We believe that the way to establish the proper climate for shared decision making is for each school board to adopt a mission statement pertaining to the process. By adopting a statement, the school board is formally showing its support of the shared decision making concept and is obligating itself to operate in that environment. While, again, the disparity of school boards makes it difficult to offer a "one mission statement fits all" concept, we do offer the following mission statement as an example:

"The board of education believes that education is enhanced and a better decision is reached when school community members affected by the decision have been collaboratively involved in the development process. The board of education will establish a climate and a set of parameters for such increased participation."

Because some level of shared decision making is already taking place in school districts, it is important that the board of education formally recognize its existence and foster its growth. By doing this, the board adds a tone of legitimacy to the process and encourages students, staff and the community to participate in the process.

There are related issues to the shared decision making concept which we were only able to touch on briefly.

Accountability—It is necessary for all participants in the shared decision making process to understand that they are responsible for the outcome of their decisions.

Risk taking—Boards must encourage risk taking by rewarding innovation.

Topics subject to shared decision making—These topics will vary by district and perhaps even by school. However, it is clear that some decisions lend themselves quite readily to this process. For example, teachers should be involved in the process of hiring their colleagues.

When considering whether or not to establish a shared decision making model in a district, a board of education would do well to think about the following idea:

"Shared decision making involves give and take, and unless the board is willing to give authority to groups to make decisions, those groups will be unwilling and unable to take the responsibility for investigating possible solutions to problems."

By adopting a statement, the school board is formally showing its support of the shared decision making concept and is obligating itself to operate in that environment.

Should School Boards Have a Role in Community Relations?

The issue of community relations is actually a two-pronged question: first, should school boards have a role in community relations, and second, if they should, what types of activities, behaviors, and actions can help a school board improve community relations?

Should school boards have a role in community relations? The answer is an emphatic YES. School boards must work extremely hard at creating and maintaining good community relations. The success or failure of a district as it relates to its goals and mission statement is directly related to the perceptions that community members and parents have of the ongoing instruction, school programs, staff, and facilities.

School boards must work extremely hard at creating and maintaining good community relations.

The answer to the next question, "What type...," is much more encompassing. In general, a school board can improve community relations by ensuring that children are provided with a quality education, that all members of the school community are treated with respect, and that everyone perceives that an opportunity exists to participate, or at least "be heard" in the process. Community relations will be improved if a board of education philosophically believes and expects all school staff to treat parents and public the same as a private school would.

Board members need to be involved with as many community groups as possible and use these groups as a means to sell the school program. In addition to community group activity, there are a variety of specific activities that board members can either participate in personally, or support, which will also bring positive results. The owner of a successful restaurant is always on the premises—meeting and greeting customers. One would also expect that person to always eat in his/her own

business; it sends a message that says, "I believe this is an excellent organization." The same is true for school districts and board members. The following actions and behaviors help to send that "I believe" message:

VISIBILITY—within the school buildings and facilities

- ❑ Attend as many school functions as possible
- ❑ Participate in retirement/awards dinners
- ❑ Personally interact with school student government organizations
- ❑ Make presentations to classes/assemblies
- ❑ Volunteer service within schools—working with students and staff
- ❑ Visit each school on a regular basis in order to facilitate communications with staff

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"Getting out the word" is another technique to keep people informed, which in turn will lead to more harmonious relationshps. The following suggestions will provide community members with factual information, as well as the opportunity to ask questions and voice concerns in an atmosphere slightly less threatening than a formal board of education meeting.

VISIBILITY—outside of school

- ❑ Have board of education agendas posted throughout the community at locations such as the grocery store, convenient mart, church, etc.
- ❑ Develop and nurture relationships with representatives of the local media
- ❑ Participate in community "coffees", occasionally held at private residences
- ❑ Speak to community service organizations regarding the school program - Rotary, Chamber of Commerce, VFW, etc.
- ❑ Take advantage of each and every personal face-to-face contact with community members

Soliciting information, opinions, and suggestions will help a board of education to keep abreast of public opinion. It is also important to establish both formal and informal mechanisms for "sending" information, quelling rumors, and dissipating untruths.

OUTREACH EFFORTS

- ❑ Support and encourage the development of a telephone networking system within the school community
- ❑ Designate "key community members" who can quickly and accurately disseminate information to friends, neighbors, and relatives

❑ Design and utilize questionnaires to solicit information and feedback. These can involve:

— entire school district
— individual building level
— specific-issue

❑ Promote the inclusion of prominent and respected community members to serve on advisory and/or information-gathering types of committees

❑ Make video and/or audio tapes available of board meetings

As anyone that is connected with today's schools is well aware, senior citizens are a group that tends to look very critically at schools, especially in the fiscal area. A school district that can "win over" a segment of the senior citizen vote will find the annual school budget gathering additional positive votes. The following activities will help make seniors understand that they play an important part in the school - and are not forgotten:

SENIOR CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT

❑ Make absentee ballots available for all school district votes

❑ Utilize the school lunch program and facilities to involve seniors via

— building-level invitations to lunch
— open houses for seniors
— use of facilities for senior meal site

❑ Promote and encourage intergenerational projects such as choir, discussion groups, mentoring programs, mini-courses, volunteer activities, etc.

❑ Provide transportation to meetings, budget vote and special school programs

❑ Provide "gold cards" to seniors - admitting them to school activities (such as athletics and concerts) at reduced rates.

Most school board meetings are dry, dull, and boring affairs—punctuated by a few tense meetings where there is a "hot" issue being discussed. Increasing attendance at the "average" meeting will help make members of the public more aware of the many great things happening each day in the schools. Some suggestions for achieving this goal are:

AGENDA IDEAS TO INCREASE COMMUNITY INTEREST

- ❑ Student presentations
- ❑ Curriculum reports
- ❑ New program presentations
- ❑ Presentations by experts on timely issues
- ❑ Recognition programs for students/staff/community members
- ❑ Educational issues forum

No matter how frustrated we become with the media, whether it be for lack of coverage, misquoting, or misleading stories, it is a fact of life that media coverage can help to "make or break" the image of a school district. However, if a board of education makes a conscious and planned effort, the media can become an ally. The district itself should develop professional and well-written publications. Some other suggestions are:

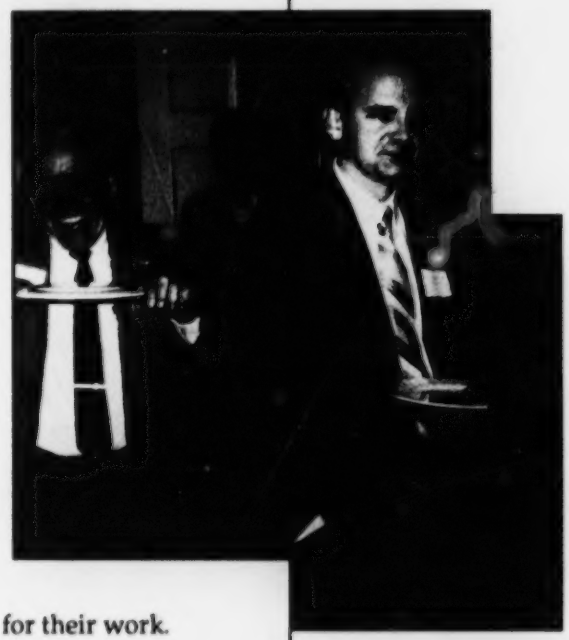
UTILIZING THE MEDIA

- ❑ Hire public information specialist
- ❑ Create video cassette of school district—statistics, facilities, special programs, etc.—which can be provided to new families and realtors
- ❑ Develop descriptive brochure of school district—both general and specific (e.g., building bond referendum)
- ❑ Produce both building-level and district-wide monthly newsletters
  - — person of the month
  - — student accomplishments
  - — photographs of children at work/play
  - — high-quality editing and graphic displays
  - — school district calendar
  - — list of local businesses that have contributed to the school
  - — vehicle for feedback (telephone number)
- ❑ Purchase large billboard/sign for display in prominent location
- ❑ Utilize public service television whenever possible

Afterword

The 1990 Select Seminar on Excellence in Education is a snapshot in time of the conversations developed in four separate groups during the meetings in the seminar series.

The report should be read as a summary of those four conversations at that time and not necessarily as a document developed by all twenty-seven participants. In fact, some seminar participants suggested alternate phrasing of certain points or elimination of some statements. The final report in its entirety, however, was endorsed by the members of the seminar.



We thank Jeffrey M. Bowen, Research and Development Administrator for the New York State School Boards Association, for driving to the Rensselaerville Institute on a blustery Monday night in March to share with the participants his view of the roles and responsibilities of school board members.

The task of synthesizing the conversations, discussions and recommendations was assumed by Steve Black, Wayne Fuhrman, Michael Johnson, and Robert Speck. We are grateful to them for their work.